

Congress of the United States

Washington, D.C.

July 20, 2023

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

We write today to follow up on our September 30, 2022 letter to you concerning egregious fraud impacting taxpayer-funded nutrition programs. Nearly six months elapsed before you responded. During a March 28, 2023, hearing of the Committee on Agriculture, you agreed to produce your response letter.¹ We received the letter, dated December 15, 2022, for the first time on March 28 of this year. The content of your letter was wholly evasive and ignored our document requests.

According to allegations from the Department of Justice, Feeding Our Future, a Minnesota-based non-profit organization participating in the Federal Child Nutrition Programs, defrauded the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service of over \$250 million.² Subsequent to our September 30, 2022, letter to you, the number of people that have been charged has increased from 47 to 60, and a total of 10 people have plead guilty.³ These allegations and guilty pleas raise many troubling questions about the management of these programs by the USDA. It is unclear how the USDA and its partnering state agency, the Minnesota Department of Education, failed to discern this fraud – described as the “largest pandemic fraud in the United States”⁴ – earlier in the grant cycle. Millions of taxpayer funds were stolen at the expense of hungry children in the state.

Accordingly, to understand better all the facts and circumstances surrounding this matter, we reiterate each of our September 30, 2022, requests (instructions attached) as follows:

1. All documents and communications regarding Feeding Our Future, including but not limited to any records required to be made available by Feeding our Future for audit and inspection in connection with its participation in federal nutrition programs;

¹ *For the purpose of receiving testimony from The Hon. Thomas J. Vilsack, Sec'y, U.S. Dep't of Agric.: Hearing Before the H. Comm. on Agric.*, 118th Cong. (2023).

² Off. of Pub. Affs., *U.S. Att'y Announces Fed. Charges Against 47 Defendants in \$250 Million Feeding Our Future Fraud Scheme*, U.S. DEP'T OF JUST. (Sept. 20, 2022), <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/us-attorney-announces-federal-charges-against-47-defendants-250-million-feeding-our-future>.

³ Joey Peters, *Bloomington Man Pleads Guilty in Feeding Our Future Fraud Case*, SAHAN JOURNAL (June 14, 2023), <https://sahanjournal.com/policing-justice/feeding-our-future-bloomington-man-abdulkadir-awale-pleads-guilty/>.

⁴ WCCO Staff, *U.S. Att'y's Office Charges 47 in “Largest Pandemic Fraud in the United States,”* CBS NEWS MINNESOTA (September 20, 2022), <https://www.cbsnews.com/minnesota/live-updates/u-s-attorneys-office-announces-covid-related-fraud-case/>.

2. All documents and communications regarding any USDA inspection or audit of any records associated with Feeding Our Future;
3. All documents and communications between any USDA official, employee, agent, or contractor and any official or entity within the state of Minnesota, including but not limited to the Minnesota Department of Education, relating to Feeding Our Future;
4. A copy of any relevant USDA policy relating to the authority of USDA officials, employees, agents, or contractors or state partner agencies to respond to and prevent potential fraud or improper conduct;
5. All documents and communications relating to any actions taken or planned by USDA to establish additional integrity measures designed to prevent fraud and improper payments.

Please provide your responses no later than two weeks after the date of this letter. Know that should you fail to respond fully or timely to this letter, we intend to take further action to obtain the documents and communications.

Sincerely,



Virginia Foxx
Chairwoman
U.S. House Committee on Education and
the Workforce



James Comer
Chairman
U.S. House Committee on Oversight and
Accountability



Glenn "GT" Thompson
Chairman
U.S. House Committee on Agriculture



Brad Finstad
Chairman
Subcommittee on Nutrition, Foreign
Agriculture, and Horticulture
U.S. House Committee on Agriculture



Tom Emmer
Member of Congress



Michelle Fischbach
Member of Congress



Pete Stauber
Member of Congress